FUTURE

iPad User Magazine

Issue 74

+ 10 BEST iPadOS 15 FEATURES

DO MORE with your iPad!

- Learn shortcuts
- Start multitasking
- Make music

- iPad travel speakers tested in full
- Discover the very best iPad Pro docks
- Logitech Combo Touch review

VISIT…

Welcome

to iPad User Magazine, helping you to do more with your iPad

With iPadOS 15 on the horizon (it might even be out by the time you read this) we feel a bit like we're spinning our wheels until we can enjoy all the new features that Apple has got in store for us. Check out the feature on page 4 this month where we compile our 10 favourite new features. What are you most looking forward to? For me it's the improvements to multitasking and the new Notes features, including the new system-wide Quick Note ability to swipe up from the bottom right of the screen to start writing a quick note.

Of course, software is only one side of the iPad coin - it's the hardware that makes an iPad special. And thanks to the iPad's ability with Bluetooth, it's a breeze to connect to other hardware, like bigger and better speakers than the ones that it comes with. This month we take a look at three iPad speakers that are designed to go on holiday with you, and put up with a bit of wear and tear.

And if you're taking your iPad on holiday, then you probably need a good quality case to protect it. That's where this month's final review comes in, the Logitech Combo Touch. We look at the version designed to work with the new 12.9-inch iPad Pro, but you can get versions for all iPad sizes.

Enjoy the issue and I'll see you next time!

Graham Barlow Editor

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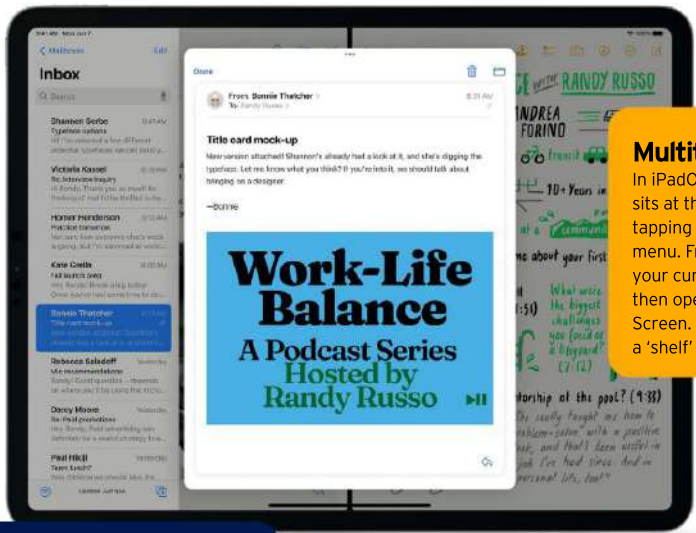
The source for tech buying advice

techradar.com

The 10 best new features of iPadOS 15

Your at-a-glance guide to the most exciting enhancements in the next version of iPadOS

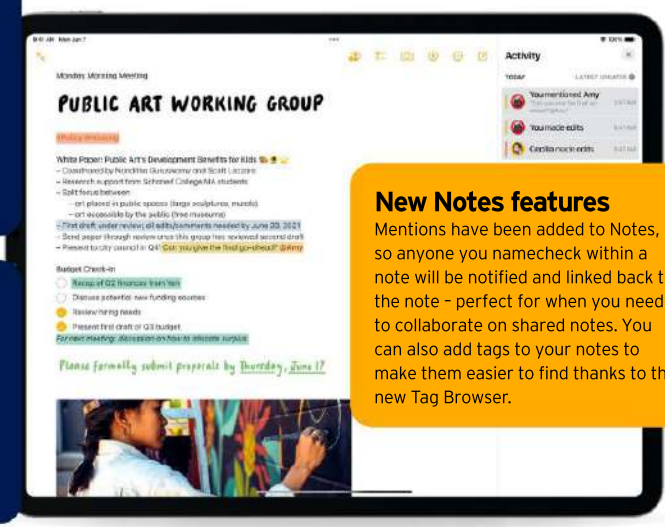


Multitasking

In iPadOS 15, there is a new tool that sits at the top of your open apps, and tapping on it reveals the multitasking menu. From this menu, you can make your current app go into split-view and then open another from your Home Screen. You can also minimise apps to a 'shelf' and come back to them later.

System-wide translation

Thanks to the arrival of the Translate app, translation is possible from within any of your other apps, including Photos. Just tap to highlight foreign text in images using Live Text, and then you will be able to get the text instantly translated, as if by magic.



New Notes features

Mentions have been added to Notes, so anyone you namecheck within a note will be notified and linked back to the note – perfect for when you need to collaborate on shared notes. You can also add tags to your notes to make them easier to find thanks to the new Tag Browser.

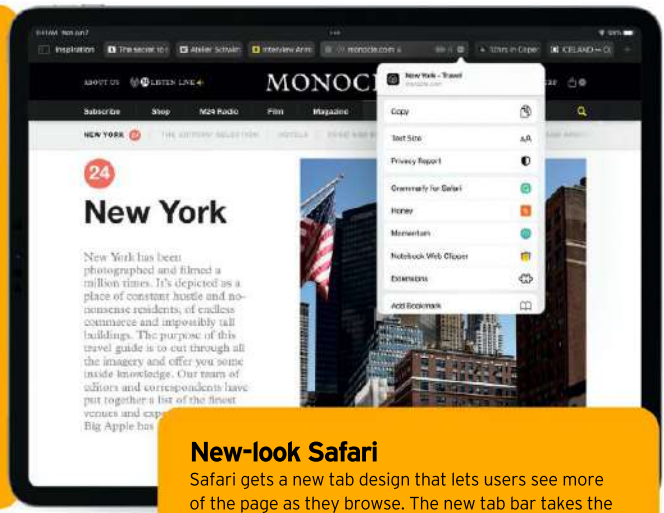
Updated widgets

While the option to drag widgets to your Home Screen was introduced with iPadOS 14, there is now a greater selection of widgets for your favourite apps and a new XL size that is better-suited to the larger dimensions of the iPad screen. Now you get more information, at-a-glance.

Image credits: Apple.

Swift Playgrounds

This app is a great way to learn how to code, bringing Apple-designed, interactive lessons to your iPad. Now it has been enhanced to let you create apps straight on your iPad, with a main preview window instantly reflecting the code that you write and predictive code auto-filling in those long lines of text.



New-look Safari

Safari gets a new tab design that lets users see more of the page as they browse. The new tab bar takes the colour of the webpage and combines tabs, the toolbar and the search field into a single, compact design. You can also use Tab Groups to save and easily manage tabs – ideal for planning trips.

Translate

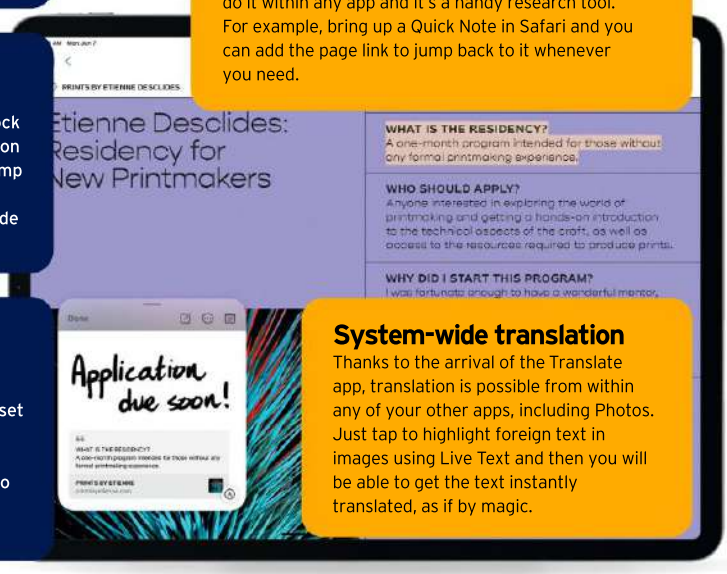
Apple has brought the Translate app to iPad and it is rammed with new features. You can practice writing in foreign languages with Apple Pencil, translate right next to a document in Split-View, or use Auto Translate to detect when people are speaking and in what language, making conversations flow better.

Quick Note

This new system-wide feature means you can swipe diagonally out from the corner of the screen to bring up an instant note for writing or typing on. You can do it within any app and it's a handy research tool. For example, bring up a Quick Note in Safari and you can add the page link to jump back to it whenever you need.

App Library

The App Library has been added to iPadOS and is accessible via a handy Dock accessory, meaning you can simply tap on it from any Home Screen to instantly jump to your App Library and access your lesser-used apps. You can also opt to hide Home Screens you rarely need.



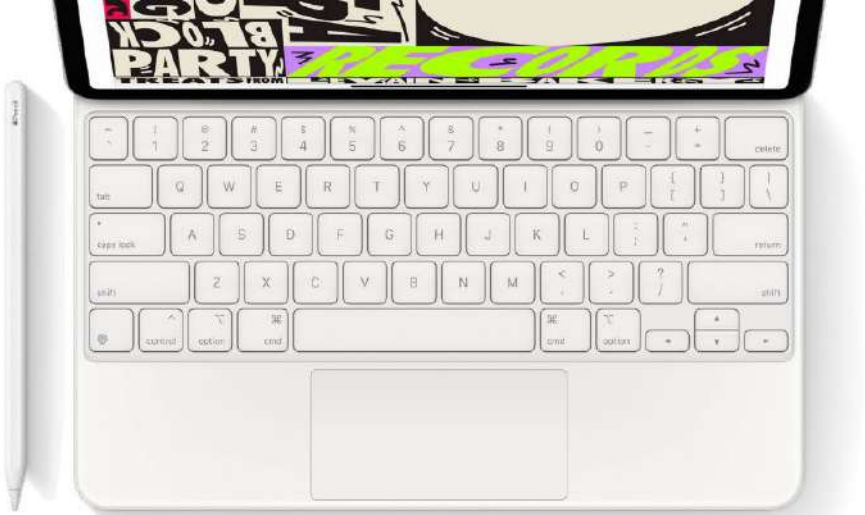
Keyboard shortcuts

As the iPad gets ever more Mac-like, Apple has added external keyboard shortcuts to iPadOS. Users can quickly set up and switch between Split View and Slide Over by using simple keyboard combinations, and the menu bar has also been redesigned to make everything clearer and more accessible.

System-wide translation

Thanks to the arrival of the Translate app, translation is possible from within any of your other apps, including Photos. Just tap to highlight foreign text in images using Live Text and then you will be able to get the text instantly translated, as if by magic.

Image credits: Apple.



The second-gen Apple Pencil changed to a much-improved magnetic charging connector.

HOW IT WORKS

Apple Pencil

How Apple's superb stylus does the write thing for your iPad

YOU WILL LEARN

- How the Apple Pencil works and the main differences between the two generations

It's important to know that not all iPads support the first-gen Apple Pencil

Key fact

The Apple Pencil is a capacitive stylus, which means that electrical current can pass through it. That's important for touchscreens because they use tiny currents to detect fingers (and anything else that can transmit current). If a stylus or pointer isn't capacitive, your iPad won't detect it.

The difference between an ordinary pencil and an Apple Pencil is pretty clear. The former is for writing, drawing and shading on paper; the latter, for writing, drawing and shading on iPads. The Apple Pencil may look a lot like a normal pencil but there's a lot of technology crammed into its compact case. Which is just as well, as it costs quite a bit more than a normal pencil does.

The first-generation Apple Pencil was launched in 2015 and is still on sale; the second-generation launched in late 2018. If you're buying one, it's important to know that not all iPads support the first-generation, or any generation. See below to check what works with what. The short version is that if your iPad has a USB-C connector, it only supports the second-generation Pencil.

Although there are important differences between the two generations of Apple Pencil, they work in the same way. The Apple Pencil contains an ultra-low power ARM-based microcontroller with 64MB of flash memory, a 0.329Wh rechargeable lithium-ion battery, a Bluetooth module to connect to your iPad wirelessly and a three-axis accelerometer to detect motion and velocity.

The tip of the pencil is made from a hard capacitive plastic. Capacitive means it conducts electricity, just like your fingers do, which is important: if the tip wasn't capacitive, your iPad wouldn't be able to detect the pencil at all. It's a softer plastic than the rest of the Apple Pencil, so it wears away over time – albeit over a very long time.

The combination of a capacitive tip and an accelerometer enables the Apple Pencil to identify how you're holding it and adjust on-screen brushes accordingly, and it delivers accurate location down to the individual pixels on the screen with very low latency – especially on the 120Hz display of the iPad Pro. Latency is the gap between doing something

Which Pencil do you need?

At the time of writing, the Apple Pencil is iPad-only, so you can't use it with your iPhone or iPod touch. But not all iPads support both Apple Pencils. Here are the iPad models that work with each Apple Pencil.

Apple Pencil (1st generation)

iPad (6th, 7th and 8th generation)
iPad Air (3rd generation)
iPad Pro 12.9-inch (1st or 2nd generation)
iPad Pro 10.5-inch
iPad Pro 9.7-inch
iPad mini (5th generation)

Apple Pencil (2nd generation)

iPad Air (4th generation)
iPad Pro 12.9-inch (3rd generation) and later
iPad Pro 11-inch (1st generation) and later

Image credits: Apple.

EXPLAINED... Key features of both generations

1

Magnetic charging

The first-gen's Lightning charging involved sticking a pencil into your iPad's charging port – which felt like a broken connector waiting to happen. The second-gen doesn't have any connectors – it uses MagSafe-style inductive charging when you magnetically attach it to a compatible iPad.

2

Tap sensor

The second-gen Apple Pencil doesn't have buttons; inside it has a tap sensor that can detect a tap or double-tap. In Apple apps, double-tapping near the tip switches back to the tool you used last; you can configure this in Settings > Apple Pencil. Third-party drawing or notes apps offer different options.

3

Tilt and pressure sensors

Sensors inside the Apple Pencil can identify the angle you're holding it at and how hard you're pressing down. That's useful for drawing and painting, because real-life materials and brushes work differently according to how firmly they're applied. With Apple Pencil, virtual versions behave in the same way.

4

Lightning connector

The first generation Apple Pencil doesn't have magnetic charging; it uses a Lightning connector that you plug into your iPad for charging and pairing with your device. The connector is hidden by an easy-to-lose cover. You can also use the adapter that enables you to charge it from your iPhone or iPad's charger.

and your device responding, and the less there is the more real your Apple Pencil feels. Last but not least, the Apple Pencil is pressure sensitive too, so if you push the nib down harder you'll get darker lines in your drawings. Because it and your iPad know not just where the pencil is but in what direction it's moving and how you're holding it, it can tell the difference between deliberate finger taps and accidentally brushing the screen with the palm of your hand.

Together these features make the Apple Pencil feel just like a real pencil and draw like one – or like a charcoal stick, or a fine brush, or anything else. But that doesn't mean there wasn't room for improvement.

The next generation

While the first-generation Apple Pencil has a Lightning connector for charging, the biggest difference between the first- and second-gen versions is that the latter doesn't have a Lightning connector – so it's not compatible with iPads with Lightning ports. Instead it charges wirelessly using the magnetic connector built into the third-, fourth- and fifth-generation iPad Pro and the fourth-generation iPad Air. Taking out the Lightning connector enabled Apple to make the Apple Pencil slightly shorter, and the flat-sided magnetic connector meant that the second-gen Apple Pencil needed a redesigned casing. We think it's more comfortable than the first, but that was hardly unpleasant either.

The other big change is that the second Apple Pencil contains a touch sensor, which can detect even fairly gentle taps by your fingers. That enables you to create or use programmed gestures to carry out particular tasks, such as switching brushes in a drawing app or moving from writing mode to erase mode in a notes app.

What's coming next

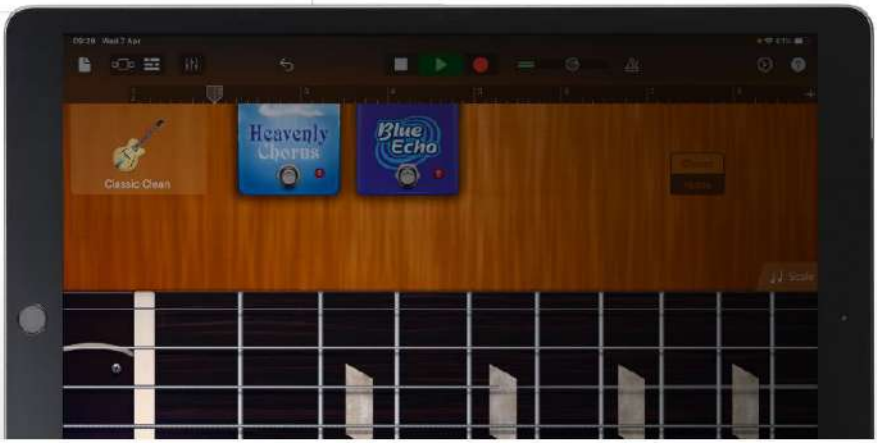
Many observers thought that Apple would announce a third-generation Apple Pencil at its early 2021 Spring Loaded event, but that proved to be overly optimistic. But a third-generation is in development. Rumour sites have been reading the Apple patent runes, which include a pen that can detect colours like Photoshop's eyedropper tool; a Touch Bar-style display on the side – which seems unlikely to us – haptic feedback and new gestures for zooming in and out.

The most tantalising patent they uncovered is for a stylus that writes in the air, which sounds a bit far-fetched until you consider Apple and Apple developers' focus on augmented reality apps that exist in three-dimensional spaces beyond your iPad screen. Apple Pencil Air, anyone? **Carrie Marshall**

Key fact

The biggest difference between the two Apple Pencils is how they connect and charge. The first-gen has a built-in Lightning connector that plugs into your iPad's charging port; the second-gen dropped that in favour of wireless charging. Unlike the iPhone, though, it doesn't support Qi wireless charging so third-party charging mats won't work.

Image credits: Apple.



Make music in GarageBand

Make amazing tunes on your iPad – even if you can't play an instrument

IT WILL TAKE
20 minutes

YOU WILL LEARN
You will learn how to make music on youriPad

YOU'LL NEED
GarageBand. iPadOS 14 or later

We love GarageBand on our iPad and iPhone: it's tons of fun, easy to use, and it works brilliantly with GarageBand and Logic Pro X on the Mac. (Check out our Make Music on Your Mac feature in *MF365*.) That means it's as happy in a serious music production workflow as it is being poked and prodded by a young kid on the sofa.

We use it to demo songs or capture musical ideas before turning them into finished songs in Logic; but it's as easy for complete novices to experiment with unusual instruments and make block-rocking beats.

There are lots of great music apps for iOS and iPadOS, with faithful reproductions of vintage synths rubbing shoulders with all kinds of beat makers and loopers. You can use many of them to record into GarageBand: look for Inter-App Audio apps in the App Store. Once installed, you can then use that app by choosing External in GarageBand's sound browser and picking the app you want to get audio from. **Carrie Marshall**

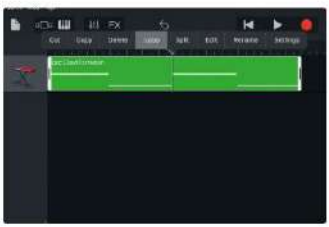
HOW TO Make music on your iPad

1 Pick what to play

Install and launch GarageBand then create a new song. Let's pick an instrument from the Sound Browser. Swipe left or right for different instrument types and tap to select a specific one such as Alchemy Synth.

2 Make some noise

We picked this synth because you can play it with one finger: select Fast Gate from the middle section and hold down a piano key to hear a bubbling synth pattern. To record it, press the red circle icon before pressing the key(s).



3 See your stuff

Tap on the third icon from the very top left to enter Tracks view. The green block is what you just recorded. Drag the ends to trim it, double-tap and select Loop. This repeats the recording to fill the entire song section.

Image credits: Apple.

CONTINUED... Make music on your iPad

4 Do some drumming

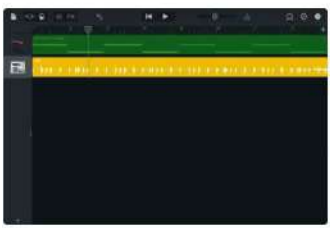
Let's add some drums. Tap on the '+' sign at the bottom left to add a new track and swipe until you see Drummer. This enables you to use GarageBand's automated drum machine, which can sound exactly like real-life drumming.

5 Build some beats

If you'd rather make beats, swipe along to Drums and tap Beat Sequencer. This enables you to build beats by tapping where you want each part of the drum kit to play. Tap at the bottom-left corner for a different drum kit.

6 Adjust the drums

We'll stick with Drummer. You can adjust lots of things from here: the drum pattern preset, the patterns for each bit of the kit and our favourite bit, the controller that enables you to make the drums louder or more complex.

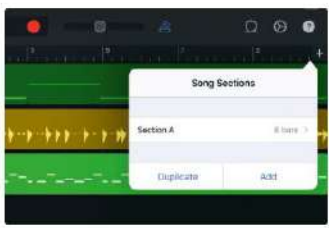


7 See the drums

Go back into Tracks view (the third icon from the top left) and you'll now see two tracks: your original looped synth part, and your new Drummer track. Double-tap either one and choose Edit if you want to change the notes or pattern.

8 Bring the bass

Add a new track, choose bass and look for the Autoplay control: it can play the instrument for you, and there are four patterns. If you prefer you can play each individual note by tapping Notes. Use either option and record a bass line.

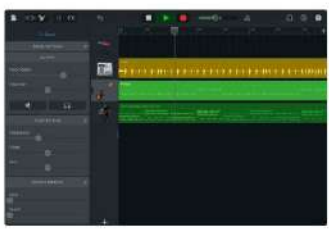


9 Add a chorus

Return to tracks view, which now has three individual tracks. Let's add another song section to our project, such as a chorus. To do that, tap on the '+' sign at the top right, just above your first track. Now tap on Add.

10 Look for loops

GarageBand creates a new section and, if you're using Drummer, automatically puts a new Drummer section in it. Now let's add some loops from GarageBand's excellent library. Tap the Loop icon towards the top right.



11 Adjust and add FX

Find a loop you like and drag it below your tracks to add a new one. Select any track and tap the Mixer icon at the top left to adjust how it sounds, add echo and reverb and adjust where it sits in relation to the other tracks.

12 Share your song

Tap the page icon (top left) and GarageBand will save your song. You can export your project by long-pressing it and choosing Share. You can export it as an audio file, ringtone or project to send to another GarageBand user.

Image credits: Apple.

Get to grips with multitasking on your iPad

Work with more than one iPad app at once, and easily switch between them to get more done

IT WILL TAKE
10 minutes

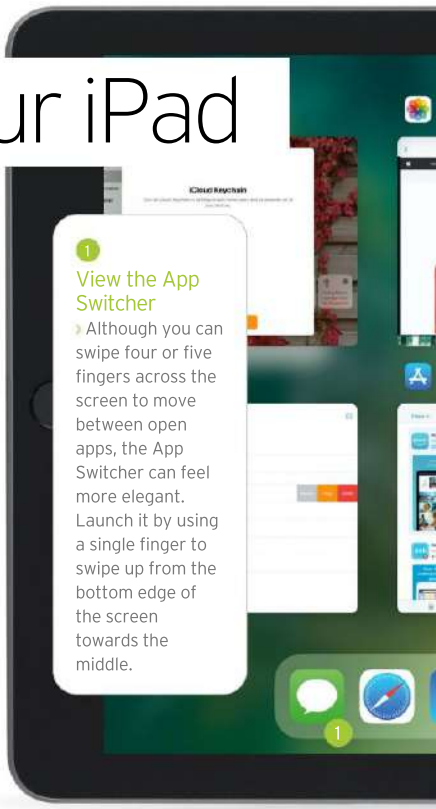
YOU WILL LEARN
How to work with multiple apps at once

YOU'LL NEED
iPadOS 14 or later

When the iPad launched, you could only work on one app at a time. It made some tasks difficult, like browsing Safari while taking notes, so there was a cheer when multitasking arrived.

It has allowed you to have apps sitting side-by-side or floating on top of others. Thanks to the magic of drag-and-drop, you can grab text, images or files from an app and move it to another. With a slight drag of the first item, you can select others to move in bulk.

Here is a refresher on how Slide Over and Split View work. We also touch on Picture in Picture and look at the App Switcher. Don't forget App Expose, though. If you long-press an app icon and tap 'Show All Windows', you can view any open windows. **David Crookes**



1 View the App Switcher

Although you can swipe four or five fingers across the screen to move between open apps, the App Switcher can feel more elegant. Launch it by using a single finger to swipe up from the bottom edge of the screen towards the middle.

HOW TO Use Slide Over and Split View

1 Open any app

First of all, we're going to use Slide Over. This lets you view a second app in a panel that floats over the top of the first. Start by opening an app – we've chosen Safari here.

2 Launch another

Ready to open another app? Swipe up from the bottom of the screen to open the Dock. Tap and hold on the second app's icon, drag it to the centre of the screen, and let go.

3 Move the app

Once the second app is on the screen, you can start using it. You can also move the panel left or right by tapping and dragging the top handle, swiping instead to hide it.

Image credits: Apple.

2

Close unwanted apps

Multitasking can become a tad mind-boggling if you find that there are too many apps currently running. It can be a good idea to remove those you won't be using by swiping up on them.

3

Select Split View apps

The App Switcher shows your open apps as thumbnails – this includes any that you have launched using Split View. Swipe left and right to see all the open apps, and tap to select one.

4

Make sure features are active

If you're finding that the multitasking features aren't working, just check they're not turned off. Go to Settings > Home Screen & Dock, and turn on 'Allow Multiple Apps', 'Gestures' and 'Picture in Picture', if it's available.

Knowledge base

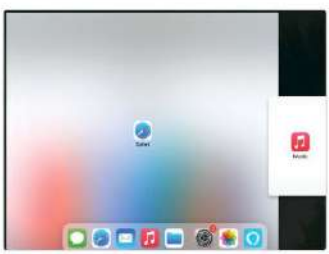
How to benefit from Picture in Picture mode

If you want to watch a video or take a FaceTime video call, don't let it hog your screen. Instead, tap the Picture in Picture button in the corner of the video window, and it will hover over your apps while you get on with other things.

Unfortunately, it only works with iPad Pro and, as a minimum, the iPad fifth generation, iPad Air 2 and iPad mini 4 models.

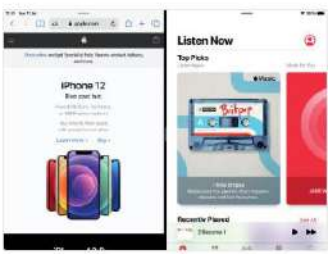
4 Add another app

If you want to work with a third app, swipe up for the Dock again and drag and drop an app over the floating panel. You need to swipe the bottom handle to switch between them.



5 Use Split View

Rather have your apps sitting side-by-side? You can split the screen instead. Open an app, swipe up for the Dock, but drag the other app over to the far left or right edge.



6 Alter the size

Either app can take up a greater chunk of the screen. Just drag the app divider left or right. You can turn a Split View pane to Slide Over by pulling down on the top handle.

Image credits: Apple.

Master your iPad shortcuts with Toolbox Pro

Take the hassle out of finding and building new shortcuts with a simple app solution

IT WILL TAKE
15 minutes

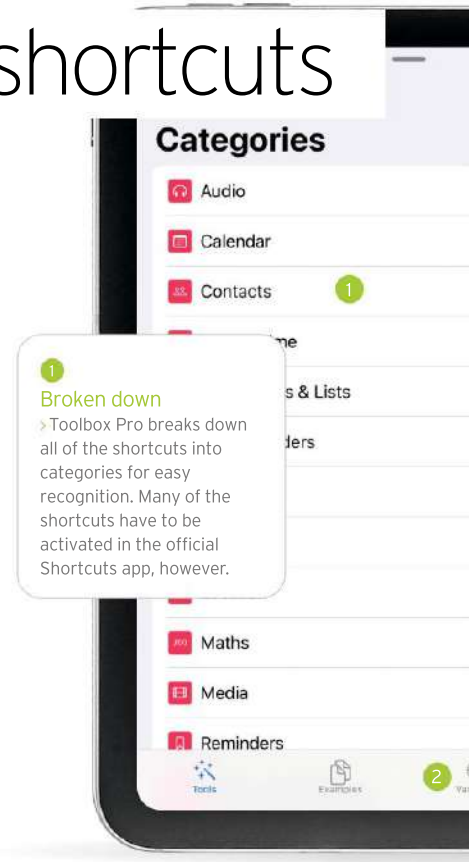
YOU WILL LEARN
How to use Shortcuts

YOU'LL NEED
Toolbox Pro for Shortcuts

Shortcuts are a feature of iOS and iPadOS that do not get the recognition they deserve. Some people understand what they can do – usually those who are capable of coding to some degree – but they are in fact designed for all of us, and can be used for anything, from saving a few seconds here and there to creating complex automations that will help you get things done more efficiently.

Shortcuts is a stand-alone app, but works better when used in conjunction with the Toolbox Pro app. Toolbox Pro utilises shortcuts where it can, outside of Apple restrictions, and it will also help you to discover and install new solutions that will most certainly be of benefit. The end results are well worth the effort.

David Crookes



1
Broken down
Toolbox Pro breaks down all of the shortcuts into categories for easy recognition. Many of the shortcuts have to be activated in the official Shortcuts app, however.

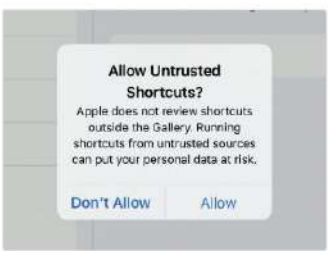
HOW TO Up your shortcuts game

1 A big library

Toolbox Pro initially looks like a list of normal Apple shortcuts that are separated into categories, but the reality is that the app is required for many of them to work properly.

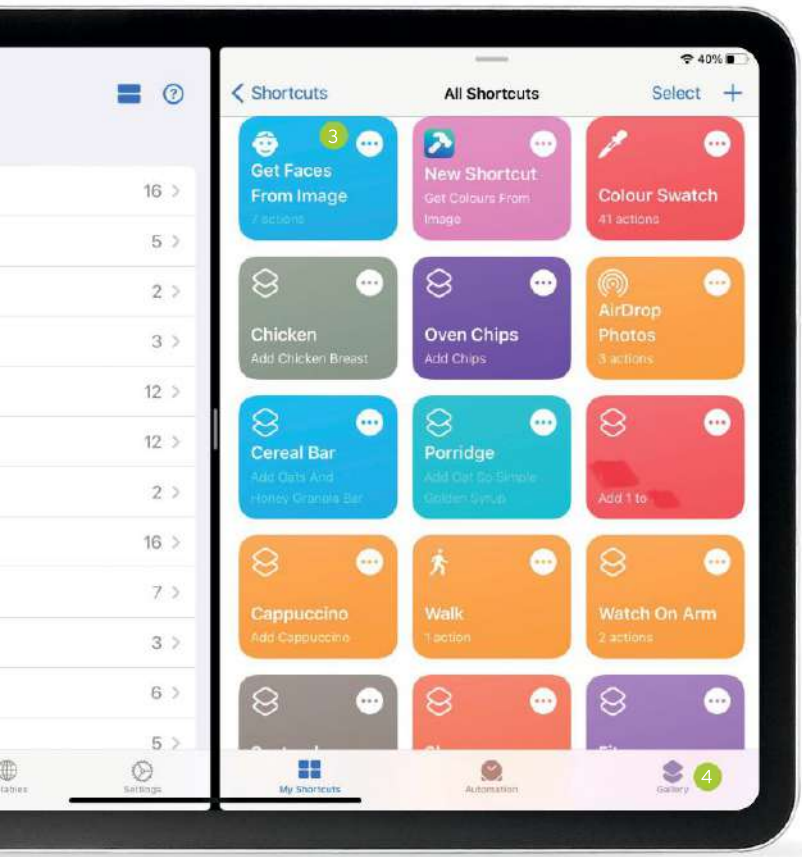
2 Check the detail

Some of the shortcuts are not so easy to understand, but descriptions are included showing exactly what they do and how they manage the process. It's all very clear.


Allow Untrusted Shortcuts?
Apple does not review shortcuts outside the Gallery. Running shortcuts from untrusted sources can put your personal data at risk.
Don't Allow
Allow

3 Change one setting

You will need to go to Settings › Shortcuts and enable 'Allow Untrusted Shortcuts' for many of the shortcuts to work. Without this, many of the shortcuts will fail to run.



2 **Become a pro**

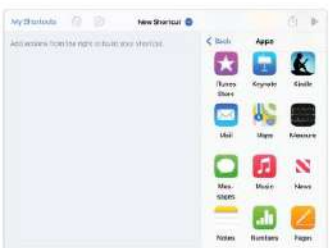
The ability to create your own variables is useful if you have very specific requirements for a shortcut. It could be your first foray into the world of coding.

3 **A new experience**

Many of the shortcuts included in Toolbox Pro offer functionality that you may not have thought possible without an app. They will help you a lot every day on your iPad, though.

4 **Two solutions**

The official Apple Shortcuts app still offers a huge variety of options in the Gallery, and so you can use both apps to ensure you have every solution you need.



4 The first way

From the official Shortcuts app, you can select Toolbox Pro in 'Apps', and then choose one of the listed shortcuts. You can now save the shortcut or add it to the Home Screen.

5 The second way

Some shortcuts in Toolbox Pro display a download icon in the top-right, which you can tap to run straight away. It all depends on the accesses the shortcut requires to run.

6 Time to run

You will now be able to run many more shortcuts than you could previously. Even better, they should inspire you to find more offerings, and to even create your own.

iPAD PRO DOCKS

POWER, POISE, AND PORTS FOR YOUR iPAD

Image credits: Kensington, Satechi.

Kensington StudioDock

› **11-in model £369.99, 12.9-in model £389.99** › **FROM** Kensington, kensington.com › **FEATURES** Rapid charging, 4K HDMI 2.0, UHS-II SD 4.0 › **MADE FOR** iPad Pro 11-in/iPad Air, iPad Pro 12.9-in pre-2021

Design ★★★★★

Finished in aluminium, the heavy base means there's no danger of tipping over. iPhone and AirPod charging pads are found here too, with ports on the rear and sides. An Apple Watch charger can be clipped to the side, where a static USB-C plug powers your iPad.

Expansion ★★★★☆

A good selection of one powered USB-C port, three USB-A at 5V power, HDMI 2.0, gigabit ethernet, 3.5mm headphone output, and an SD card reader with the fast UHS-II SD4 specification. These cover almost anything you might want to connect to your iPad.

Power ★★★★★

There's a bundled 135W power supply that can rapid charge an iPad at 37.5W, an iPhone via Qi at up to 7.5W, and AirPods at up to 5W. There's plenty of juice to charge everything at the same time thanks to the mains supply, and it's all very compact and hassle-free.

Flexibility ★★★★☆

The plate that holds the iPad can be rotated to either landscape or portrait mode. This dock is meant to live on a desk and as such it's not particularly portable, but does have two Kensington lock ports for added security.

Reviewed by **HOLLIN JONES**

Satechi Aluminium Stand & Hub

› **$99.99** › **FROM** Satechi, satechi.net › **FEATURES** USB-C PD charging, 4K HDMI, audio jack port › **MADE FOR** iPad Pro M1, iPad Pro 2018 and newer, iPad Air 2020

Design ★★★★★

Small and lightweight, this dock folds down to a handy size and shape for transportation. Open it up and flip the lid around 180 degrees so it becomes a stand, with the expansion ports now to the rear. An integrated USB-C cable is drawn out and connected to the iPad.

Expansion ★★★★☆

There's plenty here, with a USB-C port with Power Delivery for up to 60W of power input, one USB-A for data but not power, a 3.5mm audio jack, and 4K HDMI out which works at 60Hz. You also get SD and Micro SD card slots which is a nice touch.

Power ★★★★☆

You have to use your own USB-C adapter but it can handle up to 60W of input, and will use this to charge the iPad and power the card readers. Charging times are therefore similar to using the same charger without the dock, since it's not powering any USB ports.

Flexibility ★★★★☆

The stand only caters for a single viewing angle and feels sturdier in landscape mode. Using USB-C for power input means a choice of adapters or powering from your laptop, albeit at a low wattage. It's portable,

› A stylish, if expensive, dock that puts your iPad at the heart of your work setup. Enough power and expansion for home and professional users.

★★★★★

iPad User Magazine VERDICT

› A handy and affordable dock for any recent USB-C-equipped iPad with a good selection of ports for essential expansion and a clever portable design.

★★★★☆

› Image credits: Kensington, Satechi.

Rugged iPad speakers

Heading into the great outdoors and want a soundtrack? You need speakers that won't quit on you. Let us test three leading contenders

Written by David Nield, Matt Bolton, Yasmine Crossland

If you're taking your music on the go with a portable speaker, then you need it to last – and there are a growing number of quality, well-protected outdoor speakers on the market now, including models from high-end audio brands better known for their indoor kit.

With leading manufacturers including Bang & Olufsen and Sonos joining the likes of JBL in making battery-powered, wireless speakers, you can get yourself a device that's protected against the elements and that's going to broadcast your music in high fidelity, whether you're on the beach, the campsite, or your patio.

Besides the audio quality of your portable speaker, there are a number of key specs to look out for as well, not least battery life – you want a device that's going to be able to live away from a mains connection for as long as possible, otherwise your outdoor party might be drawn to a premature close.

There's also waterproofing and dustproofing to consider: if you're going to be using your speaker near the pool or out on a windy, rainy mountain hike then make sure the hardware you're buying is designed to survive the conditions.

Connections to portable speakers are typically done via Bluetooth from your iPad, but other standards (including Apple AirPlay) are sometimes supported.

ON TEST...

1 Sonos Roam

›£159 › sonos.com

›Not much bigger than a can of pop, the Roam takes Sonos' famous high-fidelity wireless music expertise and transfers it to the great outdoors. It's waterproof, lasts up to 10 hours on a charge, and supports multiple wireless protocols. At home it integrates with your wired Sonos system.

SPECS

DRIVERS 2 (tweeter, mid-woofer) **CPU** Quad Core A-53 **MEMORY** 1GB SDRAM, 4GB NV **BATTERY LIFE** Up to 10 hours **CONNECTIVITY** USB-C, Wi-Fi 5, Bluetooth 5.0, AirPlay 2 **VOICE ASSISTANT** Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant **WEATHERPROOFING** IP67 **DIMENSIONS** 168x62 x60mm **WEIGHT** 0.43kg

2 B&O Beosound Explore

›£169 › bang-olufsen.com

›One glance at the Beosound Explore from B&O tells you this is a portable speaker built to survive the elements. Its compact size and ridged exterior mean it's easy to carry around and can look after itself, and it comes with a strap and carabiner too. What's more, it can go for an impressive 27 hours between battery charges.

SPECS

DRIVERS 2 x 1.8-inch full range **FREQUENCY RANGE** 56-22,700Hz **BATTERY LIFE** Up to 27 hours **CONNECTIVITY** USB-C, Bluetooth 5.2 **WEATHERPROOFING** IP67 **DIMENSIONS** 81x124x81mm **WEIGHT** 0.63kg

3 JBL Charge 5

›£159.99 › jbl.com

›The JBL Charge 5 is rugged, versatile and capable of pumping out tunes at a serious volume, despite its diminutive dimensions. Up to 20 hours of audio on the go is possible between battery charges, while the speaker also does double duty as a phone charger itself. The JBL Charge 5 is fully waterproof and available in a variety of cool colours.

SPECS

DRIVERS 2 (dome tweeter, bass) **FREQUENCY RANGE** 65-20,000Hz **BATTERY LIFE** Up to 20 hours **CONNECTIVITY** USB-C, Bluetooth 5.1 **WEATHERPROOFING** IP67 **DIMENSIONS** 223x96.5 x94mm **WEIGHT** 0.96kg

Sonos Roam

A mini sound machine you can take on all kinds of adventures

The Sonos Roam is the first Sonos Bluetooth speaker that's made for tucking in a pocket or tossing in a backpack for hitting the road. With dust and waterproofing, plus a generally robust frame that will help it survive drops and bumps, can the class of Sonos help it come out on top?

When it comes to what it can do, the Sonos Roam is like a shrunk-down Sonos Move, but it actually has even more smarts going on. Not only is this a Bluetooth speaker, but it's also a Wi-Fi multi-room speaker and a smart speaker, using Alexa or Google Assistant (your choice). It also features Sonos' Auto TruePlay feature, so it's always listening to and adjusting the audio to compensate for any distortions from its placement.

The Sonos Roam's triangular design is meant to make it easy to grab and hold securely (which it does). The two ends are rubberised, and though they don't look or feel like a chunky impact absorber, they make it much more drop-proof than anything else Sonos makes.

The Roam is IP67 rated for waterproofing, which means it can survive a dunk in water up to 1m for up to half an hour. You can drop it in the pool or it can get sprayed without issue as long as you retrieve it quickly, and the water tests we've given it were all survived without issue. It's also dustproof enough to be a good beach companion.

In terms of sound quality, the Roam has no problem with musical punch, which is obvious from the moment you turn it on. It's especially happy to introduce you to its bass, which is controlled and full – it's not overpowering, but the Roam would like to let you know that its small size is no impediment to good low-end presence.

Sometimes it has trouble balancing a very mid-heavy song with treble. It feels like the Roam takes its biggest audio swing at whatever's currently most prominent in the mix – bass, treble or mid.

Battery life is also a bit meagre compared to some of the competition, though its playing time fairly well matched up to the promised 10 hours. However, we didn't get anything like the kind of standby time of 10 days – more like five. Despite this, if you want a smart-looking and compact battery-powered portable speaker that acquits itself really well for sound overall, and that has the added bonus of being part of the Sonos system, then the Roam is an excellent option.

The two ends of the Sonos Roam are rubberised, which make it one of Sonos' more drop-proof products. It's also quite easy to grab and hold.

With its gleaming metal and ribbed design, the Explore looks effortlessly cool, like the Capitol Records building redesigned for the Blade Runner.

B&O Beosound Explore

Refined Bluetooth speaker inside, tough on the outside

The Explore may not fit in your jeans, but it'll tuck into your bag no problem. However, that's only if you want to hide it – it's the best looking of these tough little speakers by a long way. And despite its small size, B&O has put all the care and attention you'd expect into its audio.

We absolutely love the look of the Explore. With its ribbed design, and gleaming aluminium finish, it looks like if the Capitol Records building had been part of the Blade Runner skyline. It doesn't just look cool, though. The ribbed design is a clever part of what makes this such a sturdy speaker. A circle is the most robust shape, and making this outside panel ribbed is smart, because it reduces the weight while allowing the sound to escape.

It's IP67-rated, which means it's very well sealed against dust ingress and can survive in up to 1m of fresh water for up to 30 minutes. We've not left it for that long, but it's come out of lighter dunkings without a problem.

The Explore's impressive trick is how refined and well balanced it is for such a small speaker. Whereas many small speakers attempt to overcome their size limitations by ramping up the bass and treble, the Explore has no such interests. Everything is weighted just right against each other – bass is present and firm, but not showy. The mid-range is warm, while the treble is detailed and clear, but never overly sharp.

It's not expansive, though. It sounds like it's coming from a single small unit, even if it does push sound out in 360 degrees well. Cranking up the volume reveals that it keeps control well, avoiding the distortion that can plague small speakers, but it doesn't open up the sound that much.

The Explore still handles dynamic range better than the Sonos Roam. But it's an interesting fight against the JBL Charge 5, which uses its larger size to create more expansive sound, and feels more natural in that regard. However, the JBL's mid-range isn't its strongest side, and the B&O's balance feels more complete... it's just that it feels smaller. Which is fair enough, given that it is smaller.

We're big fans of the B&O Explore. It's a great size, it's one of our favourite gadget designs ever, it gets its music balance spot on, and has great battery life.

JBL Charge 5

A portable Bluetooth speaker that doesn't skimp on sound quality

JBL certainly knows its stuff when it comes to making great-sounding speakers. The fifth instalment in the Charge series improves on its predecessor, the JBL Charge 4, with the next generation of Bluetooth connectivity, better audio, a new design, USB-C charging, and it's now more durable with improved dust resistance as well as waterproofing.

Sporting the familiar cylindrical JBL design, the Charge 5 is a good-looking speaker that comes in loads of colours including green, red, pink, teal, blue, black, grey and white. The colour coats the rubberised ends as well as the main mesh body. Although taller, longer and wider than the JBL Charge 4, it still feels small enough to be portable. And it's actually 5g lighter. An IP67 rating means it's waterproof and dustproof so if you do get caught in the rain then you won't need to worry about speaker damage.

The JBL Charge 5 has an RMS power output of 30W + 10W with a new wider 52x90mm bass driver and a separate 20mm tweeter. An impactful, punchy low-end paired with crisp highs delivers a well-balanced sound across genres. Although there were some tracks where the vocals take over slightly, it wasn't a big issue. Overall the audio is energetic, detailed and accurate. And loud: it would easily fill a room, if not a house. The volume will happily cut through the hustle and bustle of a busy park.

If you want to make the music louder, PartyBoost lets you pair two or more compatible speakers together. You just need to press the dedicated button on each of the speakers you want to pair. This replaces the old JBL Connect+ seen on the JBL Charge 4, so you won't be able to use PartyBoost with Connect+ speakers.

Another really handy feature is the built-in power bank, so if your phone is running out of battery you can top up the charge and keep the music playing. The battery life itself hasn't changed from the Charge 4, and didn't need to. The Charge 5 will last about 20 hours of music, which is plenty for a day at the beach or even a weekend away. Of course, if you use the speaker to charge up your devices it will drain more quickly. Once empty, it'll take about four hours to recharge back to 100%, which is longer than other speakers. But if you think ahead then it shouldn't be too much of a problem.

The JBL Charge 5 sounds fantastic and the volume goes seriously loud as well. Not to mention the array of extra features like PartyBoost and the power bank.

Jabra did a lot of testing involving many different people to get the size of its buds the optimum shape; for us, the fit was absolutely spot on.

THE OVERALL WINNER IS...

B&O Beosound Explore

›£169 › bang-olufsen.com

WE'RE IMPRESSED Excellent balance; attractive, tough design; great small size.
WE'D IMPROVE Sound isn't expansive; no 3.5mm audio jack input.
THE LAST WORD Small and ultra-tough, the Explore excels in both looks and build quality. It also sounds seriously impressive, although it's a bit lacking in oomph when compared to the JBL. However, once you factor in its much smaller and more portable package – not to mention that epic battery life – it rapidly becomes the obvious choice for your backpack, whether you're heading to the park or the mountains.
★★★★½

1st

JBL Charge 5

›£159.99 › jbl.com

2nd

WE'RE IMPRESSED Loud, powerful sound; 20-hour battery life; can also charge.
WE'D IMPROVE No EQ settings; can't use PartyBoost with Connect+ speakers; no 3.5mm audio port.
THE LAST WORD The audio is powerful and accurate, and it has dust resistance and a waterproof design. What's not to love!
★★★★½

Sonos Roam

›£159 › sonos.com

3rd

WE'RE IMPRESSED Striking sound; waterproof; richer bass; great streaming.
WE'D IMPROVE Bit constrained at lower volumes; limited detail and expansiveness; battery life.
THE LAST WORD A great portable addition to a Sonos setup, and enjoyable to listen to. It's just a shame that battery won't last for longer.
★★★★½

MAKE THE MOST OF MUSIC ON THE GO

1 FIND THE RIGHT SIZE

All the portable, battery-powered speakers you'll come across are small-ish, but some are smaller than others. If you're getting a speaker to sit by the pool then you're going to want a larger model than if you're getting a speaker to fix to your backpack for a hiking trip, so pick a size based on your intended use.

2 CHECK THE AUDIO OUTPUT

All of the speakers that you're considering for purchase should tell you how loud they can get when turned up to the max (and check the reviews in this regard too). Different scenarios need different maximum volume levels, so decide what you're going to use your speaker for and make a choice accordingly.

3 THEY'RE NOT JUST FOR MUSIC

These on-the-go speaker units are usually associated with music playback, but that's not all they can handle: you can stream pretty much any audio you like from your phone (or another device), so you can get your podcasts, audiobooks, radio stations and so on playing through these gadgets as well.

4 DON'T IGNORE THE EXTRA FEATURES

High-end portable speakers like the ones we're looking at here will come with plenty of extra features – including smart assistant support, on-board audio tuning, fast charging and more – so make sure you read all the way through the specs lists before making a decision.

Logitech Combo Touch for iPad Pro 12.9-inch

It's cheaper than Apple's official case, but is it as good?

› **FROM** £179.99 › **FROM** Logitech, logitech.com › **FEATURES** Backlit keyboard, High-precision trackpad, Smart connector

With Apple doing its own bit to blur the lines between Macs and iPads by enabling more cross-over between devices, third-party peripheral companies such as Logitech, have been aiding the cause by releasing cool contraptions like the Combo Touch that instantly turn your iPad into a Mac in all but name.

Track and trace

With many of us likely to continue flexible working, iPad keyboard cases are proving themselves as effective tools for hot-desking or home working and provide a cost-effective way of creating a lightweight laptop. And the Combo Touch, recently updated to accommodate the iPad Pro 12.9-inch (5th generation) and iPad Pro 11-inch (3rd generation), is as good as they get and is Logitech's largest-ever to include an integrated trackpad.

The Combo Touch comprises of the aforementioned massive trackpad, keyboard and integrated kickstand, allowing users to type, view, sketch and read in comfort. Thanks to the Smart Connector, your iPad is instantly paired with the Combo Touch as soon as it is snapped securely into position within the frame of the moulded, form-fitted upper section and attached to the keyboard base, after which the backlit keyboard becomes illuminated and you're good to go with your new iPad/laptop hybrid.

Thanks to the large trackpad, you've got all the space you need to perform your favourite gestures, such as dragging, scrolling and switching apps. What's more, there is a row of shortcut keys running across the top of the keyboard that provide one-touch access to your Home Screen, search, brightness and media controls, much like a MacBook.

Type casting

The keyboard itself provides a lovely, smooth typing action and the woven fabric base into which the keyboard is set is very comfortable on your wrists as you bash away at the keys. We also love the way in which the keyboard's backlight automatically adjusts to the lighting

The backlit keys automatically adjust to your environment with 16 levels of brightness.

iPad User Magazine VERDICT

› Detachable keyboard cases for iPad simply don't come better than the Combo Touch. It reduces the gap between Mac and iOS to the slimness of a cigarette paper.

★★★★★

⊕ Good value
⊕ Extra keys
⊕ Charges Apple Pencil
⊖ Does not float iPad

› Image credit: Logitech.

The Combo Touch is moulded to perfectly fit your iPad and offers supreme protection.

"The huge trackpad, keyboard and kickstand allows users to type, view, sketch and read in supreme comfort"

in your environment, providing the ultimate ambience as you work.

If you just want to use your iPad in the conventional way then you can easily detach the keyboard and just use the upper section of the Combo Touch as a neat case for your tablet. It provides cut-aways for the cameras, speakers and easy access to the charge port and, if you just want to sit back and watch, then the kickstand clicks out to prop your iPad up in landscape or portrait orientations. One of the edges of the casing has also been left open so that you can attach your Apple Pencil for a quick power boost.

If you want to transform your iPad into a laptop then the Combo Touch is by far the best tool for the task, providing a dazzling array of features to get the best out of your tablet, whatever way you wish to work. A great buy.

You can use multi-touch gestures on the trackpad to use your iPad like a MacBook...

Image credit: Logitech.

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